SYMPTOM

Eyelid problems

Eyelid problems include swelling, redness, itching, lumps, twitching, or changes in eyelid position.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Sore, itchy, swollen, twitching, or difficult to open

WHERE IT IS FELT
Upper or lower eyelid and eyelid edges

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Blepharitis, styes, skin irritation

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Swelling with fever, vision change, or painful eye movement

USUALLY LASTS
Depends on whether irritation, infection, allergy, or a lump

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Symptoms persist, return often, or affect your sight

Overview

An eyelid problem can affect the skin, lashes, oil glands, muscles, or position of one or both lids. You may notice redness, swelling, itching, crusting, a lump, twitching, or a drooping or turned-in eyelid.

Many eyelid problems are minor and improve with simple care. Others need treatment, especially if they affect your vision or ability to close the lid. Appearance alone may not reveal the cause.

What it may feel or look like

Symptoms may affect part or all of one or both eyelids. They can include:

Eye pain, sensitivity to light, blurred vision, or double vision may mean the eye itself is involved.

- A red, swollen, tender, or itchy eyelid
- Flakes or crusts around the eyelashes

- A painful bump near the eyelid edge
- A firm, usually less painful lump within the lid
- Watery, gritty, dry, or burning eyes
- Eyelashes sticking together after sleep
- Repeated blinking or eyelid twitching
- An eyelid that droops, turns inward, or turns outward
- Difficulty opening or fully closing an eye

Common causes

Blepharitis is inflammation along the eyelid edges. It can cause burning, itching, flakes, crusting, and gritty eyes. It is often linked to blocked oil glands, dandruff, rosacea, or skin bacteria and may come and go.

A stye is a tender, red lump caused by an inflamed or infected eyelid gland. A chalazion is a blocked oil gland that forms a firmer, often less painful lump.

Skin irritation can follow contact with makeup, skin products, hair dye, eye drops, or false-eyelash adhesive. Allergies often cause itching and may affect both eyelids. Dry eyes can make the lids feel sore or heavy, while poor sleep, stress, caffeine, and eye strain can contribute to twitching.

Less common causes include cysts, changes in eyelid position, or weakness of the muscle that lifts the lid. A persistent sore, thickened area, loss of eyelashes, or lump that returns in the same place needs assessment to rule out a skin growth.

Serious infections around or behind the eye may cause increasing swelling, fever, severe pain, reduced vision, a bulging eye, or pain with eye movement.

When to seek medical care

Seek emergency help now if:

Arrange same-day care for eyelid swelling with fever, worsening pain, reduced vision, double vision, severe headache, or rapidly spreading redness. A painful blistering rash on the forehead, eyelid, or nose also needs prompt assessment because shingles can affect the eye.

Contact-lens wearers should seek prompt care for a red, painful eye, especially with light sensitivity or blurred vision. Remove the lenses and do not reinsert them while awaiting

assessment.

Book a routine appointment if symptoms persist, keep returning, or interfere with reading, driving, or closing the eye. A growing, bleeding, ulcerated, or recurring lump should also be checked.

- You suddenly lose vision or develop major new vision changes
- Eyelid drooping starts with facial weakness, speech trouble, or limb weakness
- The eye is bulging, difficult to move, or very painful to move
- A chemical enters your eye; rinse continuously with clean water while arranging help
- There has been a serious eye injury or something has pierced the eye

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when symptoms began and whether they are painful, itchy, recurring, or linked to a new product. Mention contact-lens use, injuries, skin conditions, allergies, infections, and vision changes.

They may examine the lid edges, lashes, skin, eye surface, pupils, vision, and eye movements, sometimes using a slit lamp.

Tests are often unnecessary. A swab may be taken for unusual discharge or an infection that is not improving. Imaging may be needed for a suspected deeper infection, while a persistent or unusual lump may be sampled or removed.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. For mild crusting or blocked glands, use a clean warm compress to soften debris and help oils flow. Gentle cleaning along the closed eyelid edge may help. Use a separate clean cloth for each eye and wash your hands before and afterward.

Do not squeeze or pierce a stye or chalazion because this can spread inflammation or infection. Avoid eye makeup and contact lenses while the eyelid is sore, swollen, or producing discharge.

Stop using any product that may have caused irritation. A cool compress can soothe allergic itching, and avoiding rubbing may reduce swelling.

Prescription treatment may include antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline for certain bacterial infections, treatment for an underlying skin condition, or drainage or removal of a persistent lump. Antibiotics do not treat allergies or most irritation. Use steroid eye drops or

creams only under professional guidance because incorrect use near the eye can cause harm.

A drooping, inward-turning, or outward-turning lid may need specialist assessment if it affects sight or damages the eye surface.

What to expect

Mild irritation and some styes improve within days. A chalazion may take several weeks to shrink. Blepharitis and dry-eye symptoms may flare up over the long term.

Eyelid twitching commonly settles when sleep, stress, or eye strain improves. A twitch that persists, closes the eye completely, or spreads to other facial muscles should be assessed.

Seek further advice if symptoms worsen during self-care, a lump does not shrink, or the problem returns in the same place. Get reassessed promptly if pain or vision changes develop.

Common questions

Can an eyelid problem spread to other people?

Some viral or bacterial eye infections can spread through hands, towels, makeup, or discharge. Blepharitis, blocked glands, allergies, and most eyelid twitches are not contagious. Avoid sharing towels or eye products when the cause is uncertain.

Should I wear contact lenses?

Do not wear them while an eye or eyelid is red, painful, swollen, or producing discharge. Use glasses until symptoms settle and treatment is complete. Clean or replace lenses and their case as advised before restarting.

Can lack of sleep cause eyelid twitching?

Tiredness, stress, caffeine, and prolonged screen use can contribute. Rest and reducing triggers may help. Twitching with facial weakness, a drooping eyelid, or other neurological symptoms needs medical assessment.

Sources

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